

Please go to next page
to see article layout.

A Boy's Dream Community



A boy's persistence pays off with the culmination of Ephrata, Wash.'s Splash Zone Community Pool project

By Ray Towry

In 1996, 11-year-old Daniel and his sister could be found in front of various businesses in downtown Ephrata, Wash., asking people to sign their petition. They wanted the City of Ephrata to build a new pool. Apparently 20 percent of the community also wanted a new swimming facility, because this sixth-grader and his sister gathered nearly 1,500 signatures.

About a year earlier, the city was forced to close its more than 50-year-old rectangular pool due to its poor structural condition and filtration equipment and soaring operation and maintenance costs. Closure of the old pool left area youth with even fewer recreational opportunities in this small town of less than 7,000. A neighboring community had built an attractive family-oriented aquatic center that had been experiencing astounding success both financially and socially, but it was 30 miles away. Daniel wanted to know why Ephrata couldn't offer the same experience as its neighbor to the south.



Petition
The public showed tremendous support for the project.

Spurs Action



The first step toward a new facility

Daniel presented the signatures to the city council that, in turn, formed a committee to explore various options for construction and financing of a new community pool. The public showed tremendous support for the project. Oftentimes, open meetings discussing the project filled the city-council chambers over capacity with people forced to stand along the chamber's edges or in the entry way. Debate was intense regarding the size and type of facility to build.

The "Let's Build Ephrata's Community Pool" Committee initially studied the cost-effectiveness of

building an indoor pool that could be used by the public year-round with the help of Tim Gremmer of Water Technology Inc. Gremmer had extensive experience in designing multi-use aquatic facilities throughout the Midwest and, particularly, in nearby Moses Lake, an area extremely happy with his work.

The committee and Gremmer contacted several different aquatic facilities throughout the Pacific Northwest and Midwest. They gathered these facilities' operational expenses, revenues, attendance numbers and other pertinent information to analyze. They discovered that the initial construction cost, as well as the

SPLASH ZONE SUPPLIERS

Development/Design: Gremmer and Assoc. Inc./Water Technology Inc.

Construction: Whitebird Inc.

Waterslides: Splashtacular

Children's equipment: KoalaPlay Group, NBGS International Inc.

Furniture: Texacraft

Lockers: Dizzard

Filtration equipment: USFilter Stranco Products

Chemicals: Pulsar

Chemical controllers: USFilter Stranco Products

Shade system: Anchor Industries

Admission system: RecNet/Active Network POS

Uniforms: The Lifeguard Store



SPLASH ZONE Ephrata's Community Pool

780 A St. S.E., Ephrata WA 98823

(509) 754-4426

Fax: (509) 754-0912

recreation@ephrata.org

www.ephrata.org

Owners: City of Ephrata

Admission prices:

Youth/Senior: \$4

Adult: \$5

4 years and under: Free

Dates open: Mid-June to Labor Day

Size: About 3 acres

Number of seasonal employees: 50

Clientele: 90 percent local vs. 10 percent tourist

Future expansion plans: Considering Flowrider or other attraction to incorporate park's natural hillside on east side of facility

Staff retention programs or in-service programs:

Initial two-day training session prior to season opening, including drug screening and policy review. Regular in-service is scheduled three times per summer. Also use "white-cap" drills extensively, once a week minimum. A training station in the regular rotation occurs about three times per week (i.e., after moving through four stations on the deck, a lifeguard's last station may be practicing any relevant skill from CPR to conditioning).

operations and maintenance costs, would be significantly higher for an indoor facility, and attendance would probably be lower than expected or needed to make the facility viable. Thus, the group decided on a seasonal outdoor facility with a waterslide, children's play toys and a zero-depth beach entry. The size and cost of the facility was the next big debate.

Planning the size and scope within a budget

The first plan for the facility included a 50-meter-by-25-yard competitive tank, two waterslides and two 1-meter diving boards. However, many citizens felt that a facility of this size was too large and expensive for a community as small as Ephrata.

Thus, initially, voters rejected a \$2.5-million general-obligation bond to pay for the larger version of the facility. The council then approved a \$1.275-million "councilmanic" bond to fund a smaller facility without having to collect any additional taxes. Next, the council used the city bond to fund only the pool and bathhouse. The pool committee collected funds from private donors and local charitable foundations to pay for the extra amenities. And the committee secured \$250,000 in private donations, while the City of Ephrata obtained an additional \$300,000 from the Washington State Interagency Committee (IAC) for Outdoor Recreation grant program, known as the Washington Wildlife Recreation Program (WWRP). The remainder of the \$2-million-dollar project was paid for out of city reserves.

One successful fundraiser included the opportunity for citizens to purchase a gallon of water for the pool. As the pool was being filled, donors participated in a special ceremony in which they got to manually dump their prepaid gallon jug of water into the pool. This event proved to be a very popular fundraiser.

Upon notification from the IAC of the WWRP grant award, Ephrata's city council approved the project to be put out for bid. Several potential contractors responded. However, all bids were higher than anticipated. The project had to be bid three times, each with minor adjustments to lower the construction costs. The third time was the charm.

The contract was awarded to Whitebird Inc. (Wenatchee, Wash.) as the low bidder. Splashtacular (La Quinta, Calif.) was the low bidder for the waterslide project.



Finally, experiencing success

The final project was a six-lane, 25-yard competitive tank attached to a fan-shaped zero-depth beach area. Total water area is 10,204 square feet, which holds a total of 313,180 gallons of water. The bathhouse has the standard locker areas, staff area and family changing areas. It also has a mechanical room on one side and a full-service concession area on the other end. The concession stand serves standard snack foods and beverages, as well as nachos and made-to-order pizzas.

The original plans called for two waterslides, but the design changed to one large, 251-foot-long slide in the re-bid. That slide sits atop a 35-foot-tall tower on the south end of the facility and enters into a catch basin with a pad on the bottom of the pool surface. A preschool frog slide and children's interactive play area entertain the youngest visitors.

The most popular attraction is the lily pad crossing located where the zero-depth pool and competitive tank meet. A large rope net hangs over the water held in place with two concrete pillars at each side. Patrons attempt to hang onto the netting as they cross the multicolored lily pads. The shallow end of the competitive tank is 4-feet deep and allows for free play and water basketball. The deep end is set apart by a typical lane line and houses two 1-meter diving boards.

Though the facility was built on property adjacent to a park, construction wasn't able to spare any trees to provide shade. Therefore, the park purchased 20-foot umbrellas to place throughout the facility with plans to add at least two more in the next year and two more the following year.

Opening day & high spirits

The facility opened on June 17, 2002, to a large crowd and good weather. It has been successful in meeting the local needs of the community, except in one area. Upon completion of the project, community members immediately formed Ephrata's first-ever swim team. The team's popularity outgrew the facility from the start. With more than 100 participants in the program, finding enough pool time and water space has been difficult. Team members have been forced to stagger their practice times by age group. Ideally—hindsight being 20/20—the facility should have included eight lanes.

But the city is already planning for the future. The venue offers a lot of open green space that will provide plenty of opportunities for expansion. The current parks and recreation commission is looking at adding a Flowrider and leisure river. Currently, however, those plans are on hold due to the initial cost estimates. Additional discussion has centered on using the hillside for a multi-rider attraction that would allow socialization and interaction.

The facility has seen success in meeting the needs of its local service area and has been just short of meeting its operation and maintenance expenses each year. However, it is being subsidized far less than the old rectangular pool and serves a far greater number of people each year. The pool supplies our local youth with on-the-job training and introduces them to workplace habits they can utilize later in life, as well.

Daniel's dream has become something the whole city can enjoy. [WWA](#)



Ray Towry is Recreation, Tourism & Public Relations Director for the City of Ephrata, Wash. He has been in the aquatics industry since receiving his first American Red Cross Lifeguarding Certification in 1989. He has a bachelor's in recreation administration and leisure studies from Washington State University, Pullman, Wash. He is an

instructor/instructor trainer for the American Red Cross in lifeguarding and water safety instruction, as well as a certified instructor for the American Safety and Health Institute Star Guard Program. He also has his CPO and AFO certifications.

**The facility
has seen success
in meeting the
needs of its local service
area and has been just
short of meeting its operation
and maintenance expenses.**